

**ISN'T IT GOOD, NORWEGIAN WOOD? LIFESTYLE SPORTS AS AN
ASPECT OF YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN NORWAY**

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7,022 words (including References)

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ABSTRACT

Based primarily on quantitative data from the Norwegian Statistisk Sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway) study of *Mosjon, Friluftsliv og Kulturaktiviteter* (Vaage, 2009) supplemented by a little qualitative data, this paper explores Norwegian youngsters' (and, to a lesser extent, adults') engagement with conventional and lifestyle sports via an examination of recent trends. Norway boasts particularly high levels of sports participation as well as sports club membership among young people and young Norwegians are the quintessential sporting omnivores. Nevertheless, among the age group where regular participation peaks in Norway (16-19-year-olds) the popularity of games declined over the decade 1997-2007 while participation in lifestyle sports continued to increase (Vaage, 2009). It seems that the particular mix of conventional and lifestyle sports that Norwegian youngsters favour has shifted within a generation, with lifestyle activities more prominent in 2007 than they had been even a decade earlier. The changes in participation in a particular area of sporting participation strongly associated with Norwegian culture – friluftsliv (outdoor life) – may well represent a shift among Norwegian youth towards sports and physical activities that offer alternative forms, as well as types, of participation to conventional sports. They may also represent alternative motivations to those traditionally associated with sport and, for that matter, friluftsliv. The paper draws upon these findings in order to tentatively hypothesize developments in youth leisure-sport in Norway.

Key words: lifestyle sports, friluftsliv, youth, participation, Norway

INTRODUCTION

This paper amounts to a tentative hypothesis regarding Norwegian youths' participation in sport. Based primarily upon quantitative data supplemented by some preliminary insights gained from qualitative data, the paper explores Norwegian youngsters' engagement with lifestyle sports as one dimension of recent trends in sports participation. More specifically, the paper focuses upon participation in a set of activities that, together, are viewed as part of a larger, quintessentially Norwegian, category of activities, namely 'friluftsliv' (outdoor life). In the process, the paper examines the relative merits of the two main, seemingly competing, conceptions of lifestyle sport in making sense of recent developments in participation in sport and physically active recreation¹ among Norwegian youth.

In the first instance, we will remind readers of the essence of the alternative (sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory) features of the concept of lifestyle sports. Using data from the Norwegian Statistisk Sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway) study of *Mosjon, Friluftsliv og Kulturaktiviteter* [Exercise, Outdoor Life and Cultural Activities] (Vaage, 2009) we will then examine recent patterns of sports participation in Norway in sport generally and friluftsliv in particular. Data from the Vaage (2009) study will, we suggest, provide evidence to support the contention that 'styles of participation' rather than 'styles of life' per se offers the more adequate conceptualization of the term lifestyle sport(s) when it comes to interpreting and explaining trends in youth sport in Norway, especially in relation to adventurous² activities.

¹ Throughout the rest of the paper, sport and physically active recreation will be subsumed under the label 'sport'. For the sake of consistency we will use the term 'lifestyle *sports*' – rather than 'lifestyle *activities*' – to include physically active recreations as well as conventional competitive, institutionalized and vigorous sports.

² Adventure sports are broadly defined as those sports or physically active recreations involving seeking adventure in order to generate fun and excitement (see Kerr & Houge Mackenzie, 2012).

The Vaage (2009) study is particularly interesting, in part, because Norway boasts particularly high levels of sports participation but also because Norwegian [sporting] culture contains within it (in the form of friluftsliv) what, historically, has amounted to an almost ideal type or archetypal example of what, in the sociological literature at least, could be viewed as lifestyle sport as a 'style of life'. Finally, the paper will draw upon the various data in order to tentatively hypothesize developments in youth leisure-sport.

LIFESTYLE SPORTS

As Wheaton (2010) observes, since their emergence in the 1960s³ lifestyle sports have grown considerably becoming, in the process, increasingly visible. Thus, in the early years of the twenty-first century, lifestyle sports have attracted an ever-increasing body of participants and followers. Notwithstanding the difficulty of capturing participation rates in informal, recreational, outdoor, non-association-based activities as well as the well-documented likelihood of a social desirability bias (wherein respondents display a tendency to exaggerate and over-estimate their involvement in what they view as socially-esteemed behaviours) inflating actual rates of participation, Wheaton (2010) believes that participation rates in lifestyle sports are likely to be growing faster than surveys suggest. Such expansion, she observes, includes not only 'the traditional consumer market of teenage boys but also older men and, increasingly in a number of activities, women and girls' (Wheaton, 2010, p.22). Participants range from those on the margins 'who occasionally experience participation via an array of "taster" activities being marketed through the adventure sport and travel industries' (Wheaton, 2010, p.24) through the 'weekend warriors' (Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011) 'to the "hard-core"

³ Although it is worthy of note that some lifestyle sports have grown out of (e.g. bouldering) or are versions of (e.g. indoor climbing) activities more than a century old, such as climbing and mountaineering.

committed practitioners who spend considerable time, energy and often money doing it' (Wheaton, 2010, p.24) and for whom participation becomes a whole way of life, one that may well be sustained from youth to retirement.

When exploring developments in lifestyle sports it is worth bearing in mind that the term tends to be used in one of two (often overlapping) ways. For those charting allegedly post-modern trends in youth cultures, lifestyle sports are defined as 'a specific type of alternative sport, including both established activities like surfing and skateboarding through to newly emergent sports like kitesurfing' (Wheaton, 2008, p.155). In this 'alternative' sense the term lifestyle 'encapsulates the cultures that surround the activities' (p.155) and is intended to emphasize not only the contrast between the activities and conventional or 'traditional' sports but also the significance to participants of the style of life associated with particular activities. The conception of some sports as representative of a 'style of life' reflects the manner in which over the last 30 years or so, it has become increasingly commonplace to claim that we now live in a post-modern and post-subcultural age 'in which youth cultures no longer nest within class or any other wider social divisions' (Roberts, 2011, p.3). Rather, it is claimed, 'scenes with their own "tribes" form around particular tastes and in specific places' and these tribes 'attract young people from a variety of structural [e.g. social class and gender] locations' (p.3). In other words, these 'scenes' and the 'tribes' they attract reflect the fact that choice has become unhooked from social dynamics; i.e. rather than being, for example, *class-related* let alone *class-based*, choices are, in the post-modern world, all-encompassing and unconstrained decisions based on preferred styles of life. These styles of life are said to be characterized by strong social and emotional bonds which develop between committed participants linked by shared

attitudes, values and ways of life – often described as subcultural communities or neo-tribal affiliations (Wheaton, 2004). In short, ‘the sports are very much an expression of their identities and lifestyles rather than existing as institutional forms in their own rights’ (Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, & Gilchrist, 2005, p.4).

In contrast to post-modern perspectives, Coalter’s (1996, 1999) conception of lifestyle activities (rather than simply sports) is based on a broader, more conventional, more sociological use of the term ‘lifestyle’ – implying merely a larger element of possible choice characteristic of modern-day consumer societies (Roberts, 2009)⁴ – and grounded more in empirically observable patterns and trends (extensive survey data, for example). From this perspective, Coalter describes lifestyle sports and activities in terms of the more-or-less common features of the many and varied activities (new and old) that have become increasingly popular among young people in recent decades. These, he suggests, are characterized as being more recreational in nature (or, put another way, non- or, at least, less competitive – than, for example, ‘traditional’ team sports), flexible, individual or small group activities, that sometimes incorporate a health and fitness or adventurous orientation; in other words, activities that can be undertaken *how* (more-or-less competitively or playfully, for example), *why* (intrinsic pleasure, adventure, health, body sculpting, sociability and so on), *where* (commercial gyms, voluntary clubs, local government sports centre, as well as coastal, countryside and mountainous locations), *when* (in bouts of spare time) and *with whom* (singly or with friends and family) individuals choose.

⁴ The UK Office of National Statistics (Seddon, 2011: 2), for example, defines ‘lifestyle’ ‘as a way of living: the things that a particular person or group of people usually do ... based on individual choices, characteristics, personal preferences and circumstances.’

However we choose to define lifestyle sport it is noteworthy that advocates of both positions are often talking about the same activities – such things as skateboarding, blading, mountain-biking, surfing and free-running – and, for that matter, similar styles of participation – both, for example, emphasise the centrality of recreation and pleasure-seeking rather than competition, the increasing popularity of individual rather than team-based activities and the informal nature of much participation. It is fair to say, therefore, that there is a large degree of overlap between what we have thus far presented in fairly dichotomous terms. Indeed, the contrasting views do not add up to much of a debate: the conception of lifestyle sports as representative of styles of life evidently holds sway in the discourse of sport and leisure sociology. This is, in part, because while lifestyle sports as a style of participation can be construed primarily as a description of patterns of participation and trends therein (grounded in quantitative data) – with any explanatory potential more-or-less implicit in the description (waiting to be ‘discovered’) – the ‘style of life’ perspective is more overtly concerned with the *drivers* for participation, explaining participation (based on qualitative data) in lifestyle sports in terms of the particular (freely chosen) motives of participants. Nonetheless, it seems to us more likely that those to whom the ‘lifestyle sports as style of life’ concept is most suitable are a minority at one end of the ‘lifestyle sport as participants’ spectrum – those referred to by Wheaton (2010) as a ‘hard core’. Even among this hard-core for whom participation in their favoured sport (as well, perhaps, as the lifestyle perceived as accompanying it) is their *raison d’être*, so to speak, there will doubtless be those who hold down jobs and for whom activities such as surfing, for example, while a significant part of their lives, are by no means a style of life *per se*. Irrespective of the apparent hegemony of the ‘style of life’ conception of lifestyle sports in much academic work,

the question remains whether the styles of participation do actually amount to different styles of life.

Having said something about the debate surrounding the concept of lifestyle sports, we want now to focus on Norwegian friluftsliv as a case-study of lifestyle sports. Before doing so, however, we need to say something about overall sporting trends in Norway by way of contextualizing developments in friluftsliv.

SPORTING TRENDS IN NORWAY

Levels and rates of participation

The Statistics Norway (Vaage, 2009) study (consisting of four cross-sectional and representative national surveys conducted in 1997, 2001, 2004 and 2007 supplemented by earlier, similar studies) revealed that participation in what we are referring to as sport and physically active recreation¹ (but Vaage actually labels ‘physical activity to train or exercise’, even though they amount to the same thing in practice) in leisure-time in Norway over the last decade or so increased for youth and adults (16-79 years) in general and women and older children in particular. As is usually the case, participation was distributed along a bell-shaped curve with the highest proportion participating between 3-4 times a week and smaller proportions at both extremes (never/rarely or almost every day). Worthy of note, however, was the relatively small minority at the ‘inactive’ end of the continuum and the increasing majority at the active or ‘regular’ participant pole. In Norway in 2007, a comparatively small proportion (8%) of adults aged 16-79 years responded that they ‘never’ engaged in sport and physical activity. By

contrast, a comparatively large proportion (42%)⁵, exercised 3 to 4 times per week or more and 18% exercised almost daily (Vaage, 2009) and it is noteworthy that the most marked increases in recent years were among those who exercised a lot.

While among other age groups the proportion exercising three times a week or about daily was around 40%, among those aged 16-19 years the figure was 60% – almost two-thirds of the age group. Thus, although there was an increase in participation across all age groups between 2001-2007, the greatest changes occurred in the 16-19 year age group: those exercising 3-4 times each week increased from 27% in 2001 to 60% in 2007. Despite fluctuating sex-related differences during childhood, by the time they approached upper secondary school (15-18 years) the levels of sports participation of the sexes were converging with relatively small differences in the proportions of Norwegian boys (52%) and girls (48%) taking part three to four times per week or almost daily.

Such developments in the levels and rates of participation notwithstanding, some of the most interesting trends in sports participation in Norway, especially in relation to young people, have occurred in the forms and styles of participation.

Forms of participation

When it comes to the kinds of sports they engage with, young Norwegians, like youngsters world-wide, are sporting as well as cultural omnivores, only more so. In addition to attending an average of 36 cultural events in the course of 2007 (Vaage, 2009), young Norwegians were also the most active participants in the widest variety of

⁵ The figure of 42% is indicative of an upward trend (28% in 2001, 39% in 2004, 42% in 2007): an increase of 14 percentage points in 6 years.

sports⁶. Among the age group where regular participation (three times each week or more) peaks, 16-19-year-olds, almost 25% took part in at least 10 ‘branches’ (different activities) of sport over the course of 12 months.

Young people also tended to be the most active in particular branches of sport. While the youngest children tended to be the most active in soccer, cycling, swimming and skiing, for example, older youngsters were the ones most likely to use gyms and health clubs – an area of substantial growth across all Norwegian age groups over the course of the decade 1997-2007. Indeed, trends in the 15 most popular sporting forms revealed the (relatively) minimal and, in some cases, diminishing popularity of games (with the notable exception of football). In this regard, two developments in relation to forms of sports participation among youth in Norway, over the period 1997 to 2007, were particularly noteworthy. First, although 16-19 year olds were the most active in team sports, the popularity of major games (such as football) and ‘traditional’ games (such as handball), as well as relatively ‘modern’ games (such as basketball and volleyball), declined among young people. Second, the big increases in participation (across all age ranges, 16-79) at least once per month over the decade occurred in lifestyle sports, such as organized walking (which nearly doubled from, 48% to 87%), weight training (up by half, from 24% to 36%), jogging (up by about one-third, from 34% to 45%), and cross-country skiing (one-quarter, from 38% to 51%). Indeed, the largest increases in lifestyle sports occurred among 16-19 year olds: especially in cross-country skiing (from 52% in 2004 to 59% in 2007); fast walking (60%: 72%) and strength training (63%: 72%). Among the exceptions to this evident shift in the direction of lifestyle sports were

⁶ Interestingly, there was a positive correlation between the amount of involvement in cultural activities and the amount of participation in sport (Vaage, 2009) – as much among young people as adults. Conversely, those children not engaged in physical activity also were the ones who took part in the fewest cultural activities.

declines in swimming (which almost halved from 37% to 21%) and aerobics [23% to 20%] while cycling remained almost identical in popularity in 2007 to 1997 (46% to 45%) (Vaage, 2009). In a similar vein, and using Norsk Monitor data (Synovate, 2009), Bergsgard and Tangen (2011, p.59) have observed that ‘the most popular activities for adults aged 15 years and older were ‘hiking in fields and forests’, ‘cross-country skiing’ and ‘cycling’.

Nevertheless, despite their increasing prominence in the sporting repertoires of Norwegian youth, lifestyle sports did not appear to be simply and straightforwardly replacing ‘traditional’ team games in the sporting portfolios of young Norwegians. Rather, they were occurring alongside, in some cases, as co-occurring increases in participation, such that young Norwegians appeared to be doing more of everything!

All told, while trends in forms of participation over the decade up to 2007 were by no means clear-cut, it was apparent that within the particular mix of conventional and lifestyle sports adopted by individual youngsters, lifestyle sports had become more prominent in 2007 than they had been only a decade earlier. Once again, Norsk Monitor data seem to support this conclusion. Bergsgard and Tangen (2011, p.61) observe that ‘the vast majority of people in Norway practice traditional outdoor-life activities and exercise [friluftsliv], while ordinary sport activities are less popular’. Furthermore, they add, ‘when children and youth engage in sports and outdoor activities on their own, they rank traditional outdoor activities and exercise highest, apart from football.’ (p.61)

Venues for participation

Young people and adults in Norway make use of a wide range of sports facilities, including sports fields, floodlit trails, sports halls, indoor rinks and swimming pools. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that the shift towards lifestyle sports and, to varying degrees, away from 'traditional' sports coincided with a diminishing role for sports teams and clubs in young Norwegian's lives in particular. Among those engaged in quintessential 'lifestyle as style of participation' activities, such as swimming, jogging and walking, less than 10% participated through sports clubs and very few of those taking part in weight-training, dance and aerobics used clubs. While there were exceptions to this apparent trend (e.g. golf), it seems that not only are the increasingly popular lifestyle sports growing independently of and beyond sports clubs, the same is true for some sports that have a strong tradition of being club-based in Norway (cross-country skiing, for example). The shift away from sports clubs was particularly marked among young people and attributable in part to the growing popularity of lifestyle sports – very few young people engaged in outdoor sports such as biking, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing were associated with sports clubs (Vaage, 2009).

As well as revealing a seemingly diminishing role for sports clubs and teams in the sporting lifestyles of young Norwegians in the 2000s, Vaage's (2009) study suggests that among children and young people, the proportion active in sport through a sports club tends to decrease with age. It is 6-8 year olds who are especially likely to be affiliated to sports clubs while 13-15 year olds tend, to a much greater extent, to engage in activities without being affiliated to any sports team or club. As Bergsgard and Tangen (2011) observe, given their relatively higher levels of engagement with sport per se and sports clubs, it is unsurprising to find that children and youth are not only more likely to use sporting facilities such as (football) pitches, sports halls and

gymnasia, swimming pools and cross-country skiing tracks but are also the most prominent members of sports clubs. Using the Norsk Monitor data they too, however, point up the ‘downward trend in children’s and youth’s active participation in sports clubs’ in Norway (Bergsgard & Tangen, 2011, p.64) which, nevertheless, does not appear to have impacted upon overall participation.

As with the changing patterns in the forms of preferred sports, it seems that the trend towards less formal, less organized venues for participation has not meant an abandonment of sports clubs as vehicles for participation. Rather, it represents a (seemingly significant) shift in the blend of club-based and informal venues towards the latter as sports clubs become less important generally as well as to children moving into youth and young adulthood.

Participation with whom?

Interestingly, the shift towards participation in lifestyle sports beyond sports clubs has not resulted in isolated participants. A high proportion of those who do not participate in sports through teams or clubs do, nonetheless, take part together with others when they train or exercise. Even seemingly individual activities tend to be practiced with others. In 2004, one-third (34%) of joggers, one-half of cyclists (48%), ‘strength’ training (54%) and walkers (55%), more than three-quarters of swimmers (79%) and downhill and cross-country skiers (82%) and almost all snowboarders and Telemark skiers (94%) were mainly involved in their sport with others. Indeed, activities such as swimming and skiing appear to have become even more social activities in recent years than previously.

All-in-all, increases in levels and rates of sports participation in Norway appear correlated with developments in forms and styles of participation, especially among young people. More specifically, young people's participation in lifestyle sports appears to be playing a part in shifting the peak of participation rightwards; i.e. the peak of participation appears to be occurring at a later point (an older age) in childhood and youth. In fact, the peak in individual sports (and, by extension, lifestyle sports) represents not so much a peak as a plateau⁷ or even escarpment and whereas participation in sports generally (and in team sports in particular) peaks around age 13, the plateau in individual sports seems to postpone drop-off and drop out among Norwegians to their early 20s.

Having said something about participation in sport and physical recreation in Norway in general, in the next section we want to focus upon friluftsliv or outdoor life/activities as an area in which the shift towards lifestyle sports is most apparent and, we might add, most interesting not to say revealing. Literally translated as 'free or open air living' but more generally and colloquially taken to mean outdoor life and activities, friluftsliv has been described not only as the 'Norwegian way of outdoor recreation' but also as a chief characteristic of 'the Norwegian cultural legacy' (Visit Norway, 2011a): 'Norwegians embrace nature and enjoy the outdoors as a *way of life*' (emphasis added) wherein 'friluftsliv offers the possibility of recreation, rejuvenation and restoring balance among living things' (Visit Norway, 2011b). In truth, rather than being a singular activity, friluftsliv has always been constituted of a relatively broad spectrum of outdoor pursuits, ranging from more-or-less common-place recreational activities (such as walking, cross-country skiing and cycling) through what are commonly

⁷ Indeed, among those who exercise a lot, there is *no* gradual decline in participation.

referred to as more ‘adventurous’ activities (skiing, mountaineering and kayaking, for example) and occasional ‘rebellious’ pursuits (latterly parkour and BASE-jumping) to simply living or ‘being’ in the outdoors (camping, fishing, horse-riding, ‘berry and mushroom trips’ and so forth). Indeed, the inclusion of friluftsliv as a general category of activities (and, for that matter, ‘berry and mushroom trips’ as a specific activity within the over-arching category ‘friluftsliv’) in the Statistics Norway study neatly illustrates the centrality and pervasiveness of the notion of a ‘way’ or ‘style’ of life in Norwegian sporting and physical activity culture.

Outdoor sports

It is apparent from the Statistics Norway study (Vaage, 2009) that, in Norway, an area of sport and physical recreation – friluftsliv – which, historically, has been strongly associated (albeit, at times, in somewhat romanticized and idealized terms) with a style of life is undergoing marked changes in participatory patterns, not least among young people. Friluftsliv has hitherto encompassed such activities as cross-country skiing, walking and camping as well as those historically associated with the etymological roots of the term ‘sport’ – hunting, fishing and shooting. As previously noted, friluftsliv – and the shared cultural values and norms it is assumed to epitomize and embody – looms large in Norwegian sporting culture as well as Norwegian culture more generally and it is easy to find advocates of the way of life that friluftsliv is believed to represent. Yet the ground is evidently shifting under friluftsliv, in a participatory sense at least. Vaage’s (2009) study revealed that although there was an increasing amount of walking and cycling overall among the Norwegian population, fewer are walking ‘in the forest’ than did so in the 1970s. In this regard, Vaage (2009) succinctly summarizes the overall trends in the outdoors over the period 1970-2007 with the phrase ‘fewer trips in the

woods’ and, in the process, observes a decline in the proportion of adults that do much beyond (downhill) skiing in the mountains.

While the numbers of people taking ‘longer hikes in the woods’ (three times or more during the previous 12 months) increased over the four decades between 1970 and 2007, ‘longer walks in the woods’ (down by 20%), ‘longer skiing in the mountains’ (down by more than 50%), ‘longer skiing in the woods’ (down by 80%) all declined over the same period. Similarly, participation in other ‘traditional’ outdoor activities diminished over the same period: fresh-water and sea-fishing each declined by approximately 30%, touring by canoe/kayak or rowing declined by 50% and ‘berry and mushroom trips’ diminished by 25%. The reduction over the 10-year period 1997-2007 in what is referred to as ‘berry and mushroom trips’ is particularly interesting given that it is a quintessentially ‘style of life’ activity. Between 1970 and 1997 there was an especially sharp decline in the proportion of youth (16-24 years) who undertook ‘long walks in the woods’ and ‘longer skiing in the woods and mountains’ in the course of a year. A similar trend was apparent among young adults (25-34-year-olds) as well as the early-middle-age adults (35-44-year-olds), although beyond early middle-age, changes were not so readily apparent. More recently, Statistics Norway (2012) have confirmed these trends, reporting that over the period 1997-2011 there had been a notable decline in the proportion of the population that had been hunting, fishing and berry or mushroom picking in particular, especially among the young (Statistics Norway, 2012).

Of course, none of these developments necessarily mean that young Norwegians (let alone Norwegians generally) have abandoned or are in the process of abandoning outdoor pursuits as a ‘style of life’. They could simply be basing their friluftsliv

lifestyles around different outdoor activities than their parents and grandparents. They could, for example, prefer the style of life that accompanies surfing and snowboarding to that historically associated with ‘being in the woods’. Nonetheless, it was noticeable that young people tended to be most active in physically demanding (and often adventurous) sports such as skiing, skating, climbing mountains and ice, rafting and kayaking. It was also the young as well as younger adults who participated to the greatest extent in horseback riding, mountain biking and snowmobiling in their spare time. ‘Berry and mushroom trips’, on the other hand, had become the preserve of older adults by 2007. Taken together, these developments in participation suggest the possibility that it is the activities *per se* that have captured young Norwegians’ imagination rather than a desire, primarily, to be in the outdoors – to live, in other words, the friluftsliv lifestyle.

In the next section we report findings from a small group interview intended to help refine and develop our tentative hypotheses regarding the shifts in sporting trends (among young people in particular) in Norway. Conducted on 13th June, 2012, at the Norwegian School of Sports Sciences, the study consisted of an informal semi-structured interview (approximately two hours in length) with three sports science graduates, all in their late 20s (27-29 years) – Reidar, Svein and Gunn [pseudonyms] – who had remained involved with sport as researcher, personal trainer and postgraduate student respectively. The three were purposively sampled to represent ‘hard core’ lifestyle sport participants (that is, for whom, in their own terms, life revolves around their chosen sports – in this case boarding, ‘breaking’ and mountain-biking – and for whom their activity represents what Stebbins (1992) called ‘serious leisure’). The group represented a convenience sample (self-selected from seven people contacted via SMS)

snowballed from the contacts of Reidar. The findings are supplemented with anecdotal evidence derived from discussions with colleagues and sports science students in Norway over the course of the previous 12 months.

The group described how they had moved from regular participation (at least once per week but typically two to three times per week) in conventional/traditional sports (and games in particular) – such as soccer, handball and badminton – to lifestyle sports during the latter years of their youth. It was noteworthy, nevertheless, that their portfolio around their early teenage years (as they moved towards the transition from elementary to secondary schooling) at age 12 years and beyond usually consisted of three or more sports, undertaken regularly, and included (on the styles of participation rather than styles of life definition) such activities as cross-country skiing, orienteering, cycling and horse-riding.

Parental socialization appeared to have played a part in the interviewees' original involvement in sport and subsequent participation in their early teenage years around the time of transition from elementary to secondary schooling. Alongside disenchantment with various aspects of the conventional sports with which they had been involved as youngsters, a seemingly conscious desire to choose and develop their own self-identity and individuality played a part in the interviewees' transitions from traditional sports towards their current lifestyle and adventurous activities. The prominence of their chosen activities in their lifestyles was neatly illustrated by Gunn's comment that 'I wake up and go to bed with it [downhill mountain-biking] on my mind', while the significance of the activities for their identities was succinctly expressed by both Svein ('instead of being something that I do it's something that I

cannot do without!’) and Reidar ([‘It is] what I feel I represent’). At the same time, however, Gunn described herself as having an ‘activity identity’ seemingly alongside or, more precisely, as a dimension of her overall self-identity while Reidar added that his chosen activities ‘fit my personality’ and Svein observed ‘it’s part of my identity’.

By way of juxtaposing their own approaches to outdoor sports and activities with (traditional) friluftsliv, Gunn referred to their styles of involvement as ‘modern frilufstliv’, adding that ‘modern friluftsliv’ is more a matter of ‘action [adventurous] sports *in* nature’ – in other words ‘doing activities *in* nature’ (Reidar) [emphases in the originals] – rather than *being* in and among nature per se. The group were keen to point out, nevertheless, that with very many adventurous activities the two went hand-in-hand. In other words, when mountain-biking, surfing and snowboarding, for example, the environment not only made the activity possible but heightened the experience – in effect, adding the context of nature to the physical and psychological experience of something akin to what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described as ‘flow’⁸. All of this appears consistent with Kerr and Houge Mackenzie’s (2012) study of the multiple and multi-faceted motives for participation in different adventure sports of very experienced participants (involved in river-surfing, mountain biking, kayaking, mountain climbing and hang-gliding). The range of motives for adventure sport participation included but went beyond merely excitement- or thrill-seeking and included goal achievement, pushing personal boundaries, overcoming fear and pleasurable kinaesthetic bodily sensations, *as well as* connecting with the natural environment.

⁸ In the groups’ own terms, their activities appeared particularly well placed to provide them with peak experiences (or ‘flow’), through activities where the skill required meets the challenge of the activity and the participant becomes absorbed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The group saw ‘modern friluftsliv’ as having developed away from the ‘traditional’ roots of Norwegian ‘outdoor life’ and appeared to share Gunn’s view that ‘I wouldn’t call what I do [downhill mountain-biking] ‘friluftsliv’’, not least because it [downhill mountain biking] typically involves the use of ski-lifts to access the trails. They also shared the view that participants tend to have their own conceptions (and definitions) of what friluftsliv is (or meant for them) and in this regard had become something quite different to the conventional/traditional view of friluftsliv in Norway: ‘I love friluftsliv but I don’t have to go camping one week every winter at a cabin!’ (Gunn).

When asked about contemporary trends within lifestyles and adventurous sports they expressed the view that youngsters were being enticed into lifestyle and adventurous sports by the ‘cool image’ of the activities they were increasingly becoming aware of via the internet (and YouTube in particular): ‘They have much more opportunities because they see more’ (Gunn). The image of the new ‘sports’ was identified as a significant driver for contemporary Norwegian youngsters: as Gunn put it, ‘[Look at me] I’m so cool and so popular!’ Interestingly, friends were viewed as playing a significant part in enticing many young people nowadays into participation in lifestyle/adventurous sports and physically active recreation. In this regard, sociability emerged as an important aspect of participation for the group. Among other things, friends were perceived as providing company with like-minded others, security and feedback in the form of reciprocal ‘coaching’, new ideas regarding ‘moves’ and confirmation/legitimation of both performance and credibility (provides ‘some sort of acknowledgement’ [Gunn]): ‘It’s 10 times more fun with friends ... to share the joy and to inspire’ (Gunn).

Anecdotal evidence from several people involved with friluftsliv in a professional capacity in Norway makes interesting reading here. A highly-experienced Norwegian mountain-guide, for example, suggests that young people are not so interested 'being in a tent or staying out' (Alstad, 2011). Rather, they want to access activities such as downhill or Telemark skiing as quickly and conveniently as possible. Indeed, many of these young people it is suggested have never 'been in' or experienced nature in the friluftsliv sense. They are said to want all the comforts of 'home' – for example, 'overnatting' (overnight) accommodation indoors rather than outdoors – either side of pursuing their chosen outdoor activities, in order not only to enjoy (what might be referred to in colloquial terms as) the 'après-ski' but in to relax prior to the following day's activity adventure (Alstad, 2011). Nor, it seems, are those who take an educational and professional interest in the outdoors greatly different to young leisure-sport participants themselves. It is said that those training to be outdoor professionals are not as interested in the outdoors per se as they were once (and, in some cases, continue to be) believed to be. Students, it seems, want adventure qualifications rather than outdoor experiences (Alstad, 2011; Davis, 2012; Haugom, 2012). The Norwegian Folkehøgskole – one-year voluntary, fee-paying high schools some of which have traditionally been dedicated to outdoor life – where traditional friluftsliv often took place (e.g. dog-sledging) are said to be veering towards 'extreme' adventure sports as a means of recruitment with the result that traditional friluftsliv in these schools is being marginalised and dissipated.⁹

⁹ Between 2003 and 2006, 'outdoor pursuits' is said to have been the subject with the highest number of new higher education programmes as Norwegian institutions compete to recruit students following to 2003 'Quality Reform of HE' which introduced 'market dynamics' to HE in Norway (Karhus, 2012).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All-in-all, trends in sports participation in Norway are similar (albeit at exaggerated not to say extreme levels) to trends elsewhere in the Western world, albeit with levels of participation a good deal higher than any other than their regional, Scandinavian neighbours. The relatively high levels and rates of regular participation have largely been driven by a substantial growth towards parity of participation among women and men – especially among the young – alongside increased involvement in lifestyle sports. The forms and styles of participation favoured by Norwegians – and young Norwegians, in particular – also appear to represent an exaggerated version of those found elsewhere in the developed world. This is particularly so in relation to the growing popularity of more recreational sporting activities, including lifestyle and adventure sports, alongside the diminishing (or, at best, static) popularity of games among youth (and adults in particular). The situation is very similar elsewhere in Scandinavia. Fridberg (2010), for example, has noted that the growth of lifestyle sports in Denmark and Scandinavia has occurred alongside stagnation in the traditional sports and games. As in Norway, a significant feature of the growth in participation in Denmark and Scandinavia generally has been the increasing involvement of girls and young women in sport and this constitutes part of the explanation for the increased centrality of lifestyle sports (and vice-versa) and, in particular, the growing demand within the more exercise-oriented disciplines (Fridberg, 2010).

One especially interesting feature of trends in participation in Norway over the decade 1997-2007 has been developments in the quintessentially Norwegian category of activities labelled ‘friluftsliv’. Among younger Norwegians, in particular, the shift towards specific adventurous activities and away from the activities involving longer

trips and/or simply being in the woods and mountains has been marked. What has happened to participation in outdoor activities in Norway in recent years seems to provide additional evidence for the claim that, rather than being best conceptualized (in post-modern terms) as choices of sports with more than a hint of lifestyle thrown in lifestyle sports are best defined in terms of the character of the sports and activities; in other words, that they tend to be more recreational (often less competitive) and flexible and, in the case of adventurous activities, involve ‘managed risk-taking’ (Wheaton, 2012) and intrinsic pleasures.

The growing involvement in adventure sports appears to represent part of a more multi-dimensional shift towards lifestyle sports – one which involves developments in *how* and *where* young people play as well as *what*. Those for whom lifestyle sports have, indeed, become styles of life are only part of the story of growth in sports characterized as being non- or, at least, less-competitive (than traditional team sports), more recreational in nature, flexible, individual or small group activities, sometimes with a health and fitness or adventurous orientation: in other words, activities that can be undertaken *how*, *why*, *where*, *when* and *with whom* they want. Bergsgard and Tangen (2011) observe that most Norwegian adults engage in sport and physical activity on their own (followed by ‘with family’ and then ‘with friends’, ‘neighbours’ and ‘colleagues’) and more Norwegians are exercising alone today than in the mid-1990s and “‘self-organized” forms of participation have consistently been the most common way of engaging in physical activity and sport’ (Bergsgard & Tangen, 2011, p.61). Nonetheless, among young people the appeal of sociability in those activities occurring beyond sport clubs suggests that the shift towards smaller group, informal, more recreational activities may well reflect the increasingly preferred styles of participation

of younger generations. Even among the small groups of ‘hard core’ participants interviewed as part of this study, emphasis was placed almost as much on the importance of friends and sociability as it was on the nature of the activity itself or involvement as an aspect (rather than the core) of self-discovery or identity affirmation. Thus, the group’s perceptions of their (modern) forms of friluftsliv had a good deal in common with Coalter’s conceptualization of lifestyle sports as a style of participation (rather than style of life *per se*).

All-in-all, developments in the ways in which young Norwegians take part in sport in an area of activity – friluftsliv – that seems to epitomize the idea of lifestyle sports as a style of participation supports the argument for conceptualizing lifestyle sports as the latter rather than the former; at least in relation to trends in sports participation in Norway. The underlying idea behind the concept of lifestyles, according to Roberts (2009, p.149) ‘is that there are bundles of tastes, purchases and activities which cluster together, confer identities, and allow those concerned to be identified as a particular kind of person.’ Some sociologists – Wheaton and Tomlinson et al would be among these – now argue that ‘the identities that lifestyles confer are displacing and reducing the significance of longer-standing social markers such as social class and gender’ (Roberts, 2009, p.149). As far as Norway at least is concerned we would disagree. The Statistic Norway (2012) and Vaage (2009) studies reveal that participation in outdoor activities such as skiing tend to be most common among those with high household incomes. Indeed, the children of adults with higher income in Norway display a tendency to do more sport and physical recreation generally while the children of parents with low income are least active – in the outdoors in particular.

Against the backdrop of the cultural significance of friluftsliv, the trend towards lifestyle sports among young Norwegians suggests that Norway would be a good place to explore the concept of lifestyle sports further. It is our tentative hypothesis that their prominence notwithstanding sport will only very occasionally come to dominate the entire lifestyles of young Norwegians. More likely, beyond a 'hard core', many participants will only devote themselves to their activities (and all the circumstantial aspects of the related 'tribal' sub-cultures) during their youth, or as adults, live them only on holiday or at weekends (Roberts, 2009). Either way, their sporting identities will not be unhooked from their age, class, gender and ethnicity as the main bases for self-identities. This seems especially likely in countries such as Norway which may well epitomise Roberts (2009, p.149) observation that 'There is a tendency for the same people to be active in, and to purchase, a very wide range of leisure goods and services' in no small measure due to their relatively high levels of disposable income but also due to 'a leisure multiplier which works by one activity and one set of leisure relationships introducing those concerned to additional interests and activities' (p.149).

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